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Memorial Address

by

Hon. Charles N. Fowler

At the Laying of the
Corner Stone of the
Soldiers' and Sailors'
Monument, Elizabeth
New Jersey

Decoration Day, May Thirtieth, 1906

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HON. CHARLES N. FOWLER

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"With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right,—let us strive to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan! to do all which may achieve a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

—Abraham Lincoln

IF the recurrence of this day brought with it only thoughts of rest and recreation, its importance would be slight indeed; but there is a lesson of individual responsibility and national duty, inspired by the fragrance of its flowers rising like a sacred incense over the green that drapes the graves of our dead. This beautiful ceremonial of patriotic sentiment sprang from the hearts of the people like all divine forces which make for righteousness in the world, and did not wait upon its ordination by law.

Thirty-eight years ago, the fifth of this month, General Orders, No. 11, were issued from the Adjutant General's office, Headquarters, Grand Army of the Republic, containing these words:—

"The 30th day of May, 1868, is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defence of their country during the late rebellion and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village and hamlet churchyard in the land."

These orders were signed by the first civilian soldier of the Republic—General John A. Logan.

So whole-souled, patriotic and universal was the response, that on April 12th, of the following year, General Orders, No. 21, again issued by General Logan, contained these words, which, let us hope, may be handed down from generation to generation so long as this Republic endures.

"The 30th of May proximo—a day set apart by the Grand Army of the Republic to commemorate the glorious deeds of our departed comrades—will be observed throughout the United States in such manner as befits the solemnities of the occasion and as will testify the undying love of a grateful people for the memory of those who died that the nation might live."

The intervening years have only exalted the cause and glorified the names of those whose blood purchased the regeneration of the Republic. Tremendous, indeed, must have been that epoch, which, in the evolution of Anglo-Saxon liberty, gave to the world Abraham Lincoln, the greatest, the wisest, the noblest, the gentlest, the purest, the sweetest character that has visited this earth since the Son of Man walked the shores of Galilee.

The first flowers were strewn by comrades of the dead, bereft widows, heartbroken mothers and sorrowing brothers and sisters. The flowers strewn to-day will fall not only from the unsteady and trembling

hands of those who can recall that awful conflict, but will be poured out in bounteous profusion from the arms of more than two generations of sons and daughters, who, with grateful recollection and patriotic reverence bow before the altar made holy by the devotion and blood of the soldiers and sailors of 1861.

What association, what man, what woman, what son or daughter would not join with enthusiasm in the ceremonies of this day? Here are the sacred remnants of our army and navy—may they remain long with us! Here is a great concourse of people, individuals vying with organizations, and youth with age, to pay tribute to the memories of those whose sacrifices, however great, no one would now recall.

The preservation of the unity of the Republic was essential to the highest and most progressive civilization of the world. One Constitution, one liberty and a single destiny alone have made this the most puissant political force on the globe. The influence of our national spirit has touched every source of constitutional and legislative power, and is leading the world to a larger personal liberty and a corresponding personal responsibility. The deeds of our soldiers and sailors are immortalized in their effects upon the welfare of the human race. So long as the children of men shall study the science of self-government, so long will this republic, saved and redeemed by the civil war, be the north star, guiding them into the realms of international unity—into the reign of universal peace. The only true, enduring and eternal monument to our heroes is the respect of all governments and the reverence of all men for that flag from whose constellation not a single star has ever been, nor shall ever be, erased.

Enduring, indeed eternal and universal, as is the influence of their work, it is fit that we meet upon occasions like this, almost a half a century removed from the hour of conflict, recount their achievements of valor, and erect this testimonial of our faith in their love of country, self-sacrifice and devotion to the institutions of liberty and self-government.

For a few years more, the monument here erected will receive the grateful glance of an old soldier, who tottering by, now and then, may linger at its foot to revel in memories of the call to arms, the enlistment, the camp, the march, the battle, the comrades dying on every side, the surrender, the glad news of the republic saved, the sweet home-coming, the new start in the race of life, the acquittance of every duty, the willingness to depart and join in the bivouac on the other shore. Soon, too soon, the sun will have set for the last one of the boys in blue.

Thenceforth, year after year, in the coming time, until the elements shall wear and waste this cornerstone, let mothers linger where the

old soldier stood; and at this base tell and retell to their sons the story of our republic, pointing out what it means to be a citizen, a true citizen —a standard bearer and a flag defender of this country.

Let them teach their sons how this nation was born, what this government really is, and the worthy part New Jersey has played at every step of development to the day of recital.

In the blood of the Jersey Blues coursed the daring of the Danes who settled at Bergen in 1617, the tenacity of the Dutch who settled at Fort Nassau in 1623, the fidelity of the Swede who settled in South Jersey in 1631, the self-governing impulse of the English who, under the lead of Carteret, settled at Elizabethtown with thirty families in 1665.

Here, too, it was that the first general assembly of the province met in 1688, composed of the Governor, Council and House of Burgesses.

The national spirit was springing into being all along the Atlantic coast, and found no more fertile soil than right here where we stand. The units of representative self-government, scattered from Plymouth Rock to Jamestown, soon felt their dependence; and came to appreciate the force that was to combine and fuse them into a single political factor, having a common cause and but one destiny.

The organized governments of the entire coast were Anglo-Saxon; but here, in the freer and more exhilarating air of the new continent, religious liberty was grafted upon the political institutions of the mother country. And for the first time Anglo-Saxon liberty meant liberty of conscience as well as political liberty. For a hundred years—may that be but a day in the life of the nation—for a hundred years I say, the struggle for national existence went on, culminating in the American Revolution, the most stupendous event since the Christian era began. Freedom of conscience, freedom of thought; free speech; free institutions; representative government—a free man, who was to become the cornerstone of the republic and the hope of the world—all was at stake.

In this mighty and glorious contest, in this nation-building and character-making epoch, New Jersey gave as many lives as all the New England States combined; and, during the whole war the main American army remained upon her soil, except for a period of nine months between September, 1777, and June, 1778, when the British occupied Philadelphia, and for two months in the autumn of 1781, when Cornwallis marched to Yorktown, only to surrender his sword to the invincible Washington. New Jersey was the very centre of the stage of action, and among the most thrilling scenes of the drama were those enacted at Trenton and Princeton, Fort Mercer and Red Bank, Monmouth and Springfield.

Certain it is that the authorship of the Declaration of Independence immortalized Jefferson; but equally certain it is that the eloquent words of John Witherspoon, President of Princeton College, secured its adoption and the signatures of the members of the Congress. Referring to that matchless instrument, he said:—

"He who will not respond to its accents and strain every nerve to carry into effect its provisions is unworthy the name of freeman. Although these gray hairs must descend into the sepulchre, I would infinitely rather they should descend thither by the hand of the public executioner than desert at this time the sacred cause of my country."

With Witherspoon's signature came those of Richard Stockton, Francis Hopkinson, John Hart and Abraham Clark, a native and resident of Elizabeth.

With what self-sacrifice and possible danger the Declaration of Independence was sent forth to the world, we can only imagine. Through seven long and weary years the foundations of self-government were laid broader and deeper than ever before, and cemented with the bravest and best blood of the newly born nation. In building the superstructure of that Constitution, under which we have lived for nearly a century and a quarter, New Jersey took no second part; but through the representation of David Brearly, William C. Houston, William Paterson, William Livingston, and Jonathan Dayton, agreed upon a form of national government which received the unanimous approval of her people; being only preceded by Delaware and Pennsylvania in the ratification of this second most important stage in the life of the nation. Thus it was this national state was formed for eternity, and with it came obligations binding the past to the ever-changing present, and the ever living present to the fathomless future.

This nation is a mighty partnership of eighty million members. Each member is a trustee of the traditions of our revolutionary forefathers, and a keeper of the covenants sacredly preserved by the loyal defenders of the Union. These holy obligations have been handed down to us unimpaired, that we may transmit them to future generations, symbolized by a flag of purity, fidelity and patriotism, without a single star erased, a single stripe defaced, or a single spot sullying its matchless field of blue.

Strange as it may seem, by some Divine ordinance, the first great breaking strain to be brought upon the Constitution, the first threatened danger to the continuity of the nation's life, was precipitated by an assault upon the very essence, the very soul, of the purpose of its origin —a free man, conscience free, mind free, body free; such a freeman indeed as the institutions of this republic alone can produce when their

highest fruition is realized through wise and just laws, guaranteeing equal opportunities to each and every one of our citizens.

With what sincerity and patriotic devotion the sons of New Jersey in 1861 applied themselves to the execution of the trust committed to them, let their deeds make answer.

The inaugural address of Governor Olden, in January, 1860, contained these inspiring words:—

"New Jersey, having always been true to her federal engagements, and having fallen behind none of her sister States in fidelity to the Union, sympathizes now with no party which seeks its dissolution. As she was among the first to ratify the Constitution, so will she be among the last to violate any of its provisions, and that Union, in the benefits and glories of which she has shared with all the powers that God has given her, she will endeavor to perpetuate until the latest day."

On April 12, 1861, Sumter was fired upon; on April 15th President Lincoln called for troops; on April 18th the first tender of soldiers was made to Governor Olden, and the glory of that distinction rests with the Camden Zouaves and the First Regiment of the Hunterdon Brigade; but the first company actually mustered into service was the Olden Guard of Trenton. By April 30th the whole State quota was filled, and the regiments were ready to march. The first full brigade, thoroughly armed and equipped, eager to defend the capitol and the Union, reached Washington on May 6th. It was a New Jersey brigade that brought relief and courage to an isolated and panic-stricken city. It was a New Jersey brigade that built one of the first redoubts on Virginia soil, named Fort Runyon, in honor of its distinguished commander.

This patriotic impulse, readiness and intrepidity marked the New Jersey troops throughout the war. Even before the war had well begun, their conduct, their bravery, was so conspicuous that when the retreating columns from first Bull Run swept by Senator Wade, who despairingly lingered on the heights of Centreville, he shouted:—"Give us a brigade of those Jerseymen, and we will beat the enemy still."

But this appreciation of our troops can cause no wonder when we recall the inspiring daring of General Kearney at White Oak Swamp, his intrepidity at Malvern Hill, his fiery protest when the orders for retreat to Harrison's Landing were received.

"I, Philip Kearney," he declared, "an old soldier, enter my solemn protest against the order for retreat. We ought, instead of retreating, to follow up the enemy and take Richmond."

Pope, crushed by the enemy, his entire army and the City of Washington threatened with capture, turned instinctively to Kearney for help; for wherever Kearney went, victory followed. As Stevens fell, with

flag in hand, and our forces faltered, Kearney, with godlike courage, hurled his columns against the advancing lines of the enemy, and dashed them back in complete disorder, saving Pope from destruction, the capital from occupation, the North from invasion.

"Where the red volleys poured, where the clamor rose highest,
Where the dead lay in clumps through the dwarf oak and pine,
Where the aim from the thicket was surest and highest,
No charge like Phil Kearney's along the whole line."

The price of this gallant and ever-memorable achievement was the life of one of the gentlest, bravest and most gallant soldiers that ever died for his country. The career of Philip Kearney is a rich heritage of this State—a bright jewel in the crown of the nation.

No one can read the story of the Second New Jersey Brigade at Chancellorsville, under General Mott, without feeling a thrill of pride, without glorying in the masterful work of General Sewell. Sewell took command at the critical moment. He led that most brilliant advance. He routed the enemy, capturing eight colors.

What Jerseyman, a hundred—aye, a thousand—years hence, will not read and reread the story of the First Brigade under General Torbet at Crampton's Pass—how they rushed up the rocky slopes in the face of leaden hail; how they swept over six rail fences and two stone walls; how they drove the enemy from his fastnesses over the summit and down the farther side, until darkness halted the pursuit?

What State would not be proud to claim Kilpatrick, one of the first to fall wounded at Big Bethel, that very first battle of the war, and who, in the closing days of the war, with his peerless horsemen, so perfectly protected Sherman against forays in his march of 300 miles to the sea, that not a single wagon was lost?

Among all the brave deeds at Stone River, Harker's was the bravest. His immovable stand at Chickamauga, while his command kept melting under that awful cross-fire, made it possible for Thomas to prove the Rock that should save the army.

While this gallant Jerseyman was commanding a column in the van at Kennesaw Mountain, he fell, mortally wounded.

"Have we taken the mountain?" were his last words.

So we could recount a thousand other deeds of daring, and find on every battlefield an exploit in which Jerseymen must take peculiar pride. More than 75,000 freemen from Jersey homes offered their lives as a sacrifice to the institutions of human liberty—offered their lives that the government which guarantees equality and equal opportu-

nities under the operation of just laws might not perish from the earth; offered their lives at their country's call, ready and eager to

"Strike for our broad and goodly land
Blow after blow till men should see
That Right and Might move hand in hand,
And glorious must their triumph be."

To-day the spirit of Abraham Lincoln pervades the whole fatherland. The Confederates still living, and two generations of sons of Confederates, are indeed as grateful as we for the preservation of the Union; indeed, as thankful as we that we, not they, won; indeed, as proud as we of our truly national glory. Our flag of 1861 is indeed their flag in 1906—theirs to defend, at the cost of their last drop of blood.

Whatever traditional bitterness Southern babes may have imbibed at their mother's breasts, hushed by Southern lullabies, was wiped out when the immortal McKinley sent as chieftains to Cuba, to drive Spain's mediæval tyranny from this continent, Fighting Joe Wheeler of Alabama with Shafter of Michigan, Gordon of Georgia with Wilson of Delaware, and Fitzhugh Lee, the nephew of Robert E. Lee of Virginia, with Frederick D. Grant, the son of Ulysses S. Grant of Illinois—noble descendants of those nobler ancestors, who, striking hands at Appamatox, united in saying, "Let us have peace."

And two hundred thousand sons of Federal and Confederate fathers followed them, vying with one another in deeds of valor and devotion, that the world might know that we have but one country, but one flag, and that the Stars and Stripes are not only the emblem of American unity, but the standard of liberty and justice.

Is any demonstration wanted of a reunited country—behold the career of General Wheeler! Educated at West Point, he served first in the regular army; then, following the fortunes of his State, he became the great cavalry leader of the Confederacy. After peace had been declared he was elected for several terms to the House of Representatives; but at the outbreak of the Spanish war he at once threw aside his Congressional office, and offered his life for the Stars and Stripes; his dearest wish being that he might die in his country's uniform. His eyes last saw the light in Brooklyn; and from that Northern city where the mighty Beecher once volleyed his anathemas against slavery, the body of this gallant and patriotic general was borne away in sadness, but amid showers of tears and flowers, a continuing tribute of respect and affection, and now lies buried on the storied heights of Arlington, once the home of Martha Washington and of Robert E. Lee, her direct descendant

and now a national cemetery. There Fighting-Joe Wheeler sleeps by the side of Sheridan and Rosecrans, Crook and Wright, Schofield and Lawton—in the very midst of our army of heroic dead who wore the blue.

"From the silence of sorrowful hours
The desolate mourners go,
Lovingly laden with flowers
Alike for the friend and the foe;
Under the sod and the dew,
Waiting the judgment day;
Under the roses, the Blue;
Under the lilies, the Gray.

"No more shall the war-cry sever,
Or the winding rivers be red;
They banish our anger forever,
When they laurel the graves of our dead.
Under the sod and the dew,
Waiting the judgment day;
Love and tears for the Blue;
Tears and love for the Gray."

The covenants of the three generations of the eighteenth century with the three generations of the nineteenth century have been faithfully observed and sacredly kept by the three generations of the nineteenth century; and the republic, which numbered only five millions in 1800, has more than eighty-five millions now; and before the three generations of the twentieth century shall transmit this sacred trust, it will include more than two hundred and fifty millions, all speaking the English tongue, and speaking it everywhere better than it is spoken anywhere else on the globe.

If the three generations of this century of our national life shall keep their covenants with the generations of the republic gone before, then American Anglo-Saxon liberty must characterize all civic institutions. Conquests, on their second journey around the world, will be industrial not martial conquests. They will be conquests of construction and plenty, not conquests of destruction and want. They will be conquests of peace and honor, to liberate and ennoble, not conquests of ambition and greed, to enslave and exploit.

Eons and eons ago the human family, parting in the valley of the Euphrates, moved eastward and westward, until now it has met and is reuniting on this continent. We are reaping the harvest of the ages.

The achievements of every race is ours; but thus far there has been no vital civilization that has not been the fruitage of one dominant idea. That of the Egyptian was life; that of the Persian was light; that of the Hebrew was religion; that of the Greek was beauty; that of the Roman was law; that of the Anglo-Saxon was self-government; that of the American is manhood.

Indeed, "Time's noblest offspring is the last!"

Our covenant with the past is to preserve inviolate the Constitution and the principles of free government. Our covenant with the future is to enlarge, strengthen and ennoble the individualism of the American citizen.

We live in a most remarkable time! The whole world has been brought within speaking distance of itself. By the transmission of thought and the transfusion of power, mankind will soon become essentially one.

We live in the very best time and under the very best government in the world. But let us remember that there is no opportunity without its corresponding responsibility, and that favor and duty go hand in hand.

Charles Darwin said of us:—"There is apparently much truth in the belief that the wonderful progress of the United States, as well as the character of the people, are the results of natural selection; for the more energetic, restless and courageous men from all parts of Europe have emigrated during the last ten or twelve generations to that great country, and have there succeeded best."

It is our duty to see that those sources of natural selection shall not be contaminated, and that the current of our national blood shall run at least as pure, clear and strong as it ran in the past. Let us remember that poverty of purse should be no bar to a partnership in the republic; but that poverty of blood, poverty of mind and poverty of morals can only lead to the degradation, degeneration and ultimate destruction of that high standard of American citizenship without which the mission of this nation must inevitably fall. Mental soundness, intellectual honesty, moral courage, high spirit, physical force and a universal intelligence are the qualities which alone will make for the true, enduring glory of the republic.

If this government is indeed to be a government of the people, by the people and for the people, its success must be measured by the average quality of its individual units. The mental and moral development in equal degree, therefore, of every member of our body politic should be the dual purpose of our educational institutions.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, who, on being asked when the training of a child should begin, replied, "A hundred years before its birth," pro-

phetically pronounced a rule of action for our guidance during the twentieth century, if those are to be well qualified who shall receive the ark of the covenant of this republic, with all its solemn obligations, from our hands. Let every American home, every grade in our public schools, every academy, college and university become places not merely of mental training, but of character building.

It is well to know a fact, better to know the relations of facts, still better to know our relation to facts; but, above all, it is best to know our relation to one another, because of those same facts, through the forms of law called the State.

The constitution and the laws of New Jersey form an executed contract between each of us and the State; and public duty and personal patriotism alike demand that we keep it as inviolate as we would keep the obvious intent of a contract between each other.

Altogether too often the solicitous inquiries, "What says the constitution?" "What is the law?" are made for the sole, determined purpose of evading or breaking their provisions.

Are we not forgetting that there are such things as ideals; and that the recognition of them was a characteristic of our forefathers? Can we hope to be worthy of our exalted citizenship, unless ideals challenge our thoughts and direct our conduct at every cross-road of life? We owe it to the State to uphold and defend, and happily to enrich if possible the glorious traditions of our Courts. The splendid history of New Jersey demands the very best services of our very best citizens in every function of our political life. Each one of us owes it to himself and to the community in which he lives, as well as to the State, to defend, and not assail, the character of his neighbor on every occasion; else subtle insinuation, idle clamor and cruel slander will destroy with the shafts of jealousy those influences that make for community-idealism.

Since honor is "the finest sense of justice the human mind can frame," let honor rule; and may we all

"Poise the cause in Justice's equal scales,
Whose beam stands sure, whose rightful cause prevails."

A century ago life was a simple and direct relationship of man with man; and our productive capacity was measured only by human and horse power.

To-day the relationship of man is almost entirely indirect, and its intricacies and complexities are past finding out; while the collective energy or working power of this nation, through invention, discovery, organization and combination, now approximates the effective or working power of 500,000,000 men, or of one-third of all the people on the globe.

The occupations of one-half of our people in the world's to-day

were not even suggested during the world's yesterday. The occupations of a majority of our people in the world's to-morrow are not even dreamed of in the world's to-day.

The impossibilities of yesterday are the common happenings of to-day.

The stupendous and gigantic developments in the material world through inventions and discoveries have for the time being overwhelmed all other than commercial considerations; and man, seemingly, has been put in the scales against dollars and cents. The whirlpool of gain is sweeping us from the rock of rectitude; and for the moment all ethical implications seem abandoned.

Nor have the institutions of learning escaped this purely mercenary measurement of manhood. Eagerly and boldly they are inquiring how to educate for productive purposes only, as if manufacturing goods for the market, and forced to satisfy the tyranny of style and trade.

Meanwhile, through changed conditions, laws once just have become obsolete; statutes, granting unfair advantage, have been secured through the intrigue of self-interest, and wise and just legislation has been prevented by those enjoying special privileges.

Indeed, so dulled and debauched is the moral sense of many by mercenary greed, that there is a constant search to find or effort to secure legal authority to do those things which are utterly at variance with ethical right; and that function, once called a conscience, finds ample approval for its obliquity because, forsooth, it is in accordance with law, though that same law was passed for the special purpose through chicane, cunning and corruption.

Thus it may often happen that through the forms of law property valued in the thousands may be taken with impunity, to which the one appropriating it has no ethical right; while a sharp and cruel penalty awaits another, who, with no less a moral right, appropriates only a millionth part as much.

However, the innate American spirit, the genius of our institutions, remains pure and unaffected; and, so shocked is the public conscience by these obvious wrongs, that the grave danger of the hour is not that we cannot correct them, but lest we may in our fury strike a blow that will seriously check the free play of that force to which our splendid achievements and unparalleled progress must be attributed—the personal initiative.

Let us keep steadily in view this truth: that whenever we paralyze the motive power of our citizenship, and destroy individual enterprise, we pauperize our national life. Universal education leads on to individualism; and individualism leads on to universal prosperity.

True and unalloyed patriotism is neither destructive radicalism nor decaying conservatism. It is simple justice and equal opportunity for all men living under our flag.

We need not wait for the call to arms to show our patriotism. Occasions for the noblest exhibition of love of country come thick and fast every hour of the day. They come in political obligations, civic duties and exemplary living.

The vast—indeed, almost unmeasured—accumulation of wealth now going on in this country may in future annals become only a source of wonderment like the pyramids of Egypt or the Chinese wall, unless the patriotism of our day shall sanctify and dedicate it to the ends and glory of the republic. Of what consequence shall it be, except a blight and a corroding curse, if it leads only to profigacy and corruption? Of what advantage and power may it not become in the amelioration and advancement of the American people?

Let us, then, on this Memorial day, inspired by the deeds of the heroic living and the heroic dead, dedicate ourselves to that government which makes manhood, free manhood, its cornerstone.

Let our laws henceforth be equal and just, and receive our loyal obedience. Let the courts be respected. Let character be defended. Let all evils be eradicated and all wrongs be righted. Let Honor and Justice be our shibboleth.

Let the Stars and Stripes, the world 'round, stand not only for the most powerful and peaceful government on the globe, but for a unified individualism and citizenship that challenges the admiration and emulation of mankind.

Let us take our posts on the picket line of moral and political duty to guard the republic against the perils of peace; even as did the heroes of 1861 guard it against the perils of war. The crisis is just as imminent; the enemy as subtle and powerful. Now, as then, the salvation of the republic lies in the keeping of the individual citizen.

"What constitutes a state?
Not high-raised battlement or labored mound,
  Thick wall or moated gate;
Not cities proud with spires and turrets crowned;
  Not bays and broad-armed ports,
Where, laughing at the storm, rich navies ride;
  Not starred and spangled courts,
Where low-browed baseness wafts perfume to pride;
  No; men, high-minded men.

"Men who their duties know,
But know their rights, and knowing, dare maintain,
Prevent the long aimed blow,
And crush the tyrant while they rend the chain;
These constitute a state."

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